

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

<u>Year 1978</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
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(Prepared by Sheila Fisher 2/1/2012)

"NO OTHER GODS"

(First in a Series of Sermons Based on The
Ten Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Worship 20:1

Presumably as delightful and surely as successful as any musical that began in the National Theatre, then moved on to Broadway and international acclaim is Fiddler On The Roof. Many recollections will come quickly to your mind. As charming as any, of course, is when Teyva asks his wife whether she loves him or not. And then she replies in such superb fashion by detailing the things that she's done day by day, throughout tedious monotony, perhaps, of twenty-five years. And then it occurs to him -- she loves him!

I suggest to you that again and again you and I must appreciate, with a pristine quality, the basic teachings of the Christian faith. They are always there, but you and I must discover them anew for ourselves. And only as we discover them, by whatever route it may be, will we begin to appreciate who God is, what He's like, and how He deals with us -- to that extent we may find as we have never found again, or before, the purpose for our living. It's in that spirit that I come to this sacred desk today, to introduce a series of sermons that will deal with the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments have always been there, but let me say it to you as strongly as I can -- every generation has to interpret and re-interpret the Commandments for themselves. They are not simply to be accepted as something that's been handed down. As worthy as that may be of our generation, somewhere, somehow in our own experience we are in duty bound to recognize their validity.

Now let me read it for you as it appears in the page of the Good Book.
The word ought to be readily recognized:

"And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maid-servant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

"You shall not kill.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.'"

What your reaction may be to this series of sermons I'm not quite certain. And I can't find myself saying to you I don't much care what your reaction may be. Frankly, I do care. And I place such a high value upon this series that I wouldn't take ten weeks, a sizeable chunk out of the year, to invite your attention again and again to the general theme of the Ten Commandments, as we consider each Commandment in turn.

I'm fully aware of the fact, of course I am, and you know that I am --

aware of the fact that ours is a generation that doesn't much care for discipline. We have a generation on our hands that's always saying, "Give me freedom -- let me do my own thing -- I want to be me!".....a generation on our hands that cries out against restraint, that has no appreciation whatsoever for discipline. I am fully aware of the fact that Sunday after Sunday when we deal with these Ten Commandments we'll be talking about a "Thou shalt not -- " or a "Thou shalt -- " in which the authoritative tone of God echoes down through the corridors of time, telling us what He expects us to do and what He believes a true follower of His would not do.

There is an ancient fable of a spider who descended one day by the slender thread he had spun out of his body from the dark rafter in the barn which was his home. On the lower level he built his web, and before long grew sleek and prosperous. Like many human beings, he became forgetful. One day as he moved efficiently about his web, he was irritated to discover that slender filament which rose vertically from his web and disappeared into the darkness beyond. As he looked at it and mused, he said to himself, "Why, that thread catches no flies! Of what earthly use can it be?" . . . and so speaking, he extended the crooked claw and severed the thread whereupon, as you well know, the whole web collapsed.

Paul Althouse, a voice of God raised by God to speak to the people of his native Germany as they lifted themselves out of the rubble, proclaimed the good news of God in a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments. As he began that series of sermons he gave them to understand in no uncertain way that the rubble was there, and their hopes that they had placed in one man had been destroyed -- the Reich that was to go on for a thousand years just wasn't there. And he said it happened because "We lost our link with the eternal -- we severed that thread that unites us with God."

I do not claim to have any prophet's blood coursing through my veins, but as I come to you today and as I shall come to you Sunday after Sunday by the grace of God, I may strike that note with you, that it could be that unless today and in our time, unless we establish anew an appreciation for our link with God, our world too could collapse. This I most certainly believe.

What is religion -- you remember it from your Latin, don't you? -- religio, religionis -- it means to be held to or to hold on to something, to be bound by something. And God has His hold on us. God binds us to Him by His laws. God binds us to Him by His rules and by His regulations -- they are Ten Commandments, mark you -- not ten suggestions -- not ten options. But because He loves us He calls them commandments.....not for His sake but for our good. He is our Heavenly Father who knows how we must be dealt with.

Did you know that Aristotle had such a thing which he called "The Doctrine of Habituation"? Now bear with me as I try to describe it for you -- the Doctrine of Habituation. He argued, as I understand, that there is a time when it is not possible to give a child freedom. It is not that the child is bad. It is that at the stage of childhood the child has not the wisdom of experience, the ability to take the long view and to calculate the consequences which freedom demands! We have, therefore, at this stage, to submit the child to discipline, to control him, so that the child develops the habit of doing the right thing.

Listen to this simple observation: you only learn to play the flute by practising playing the flute according to the laws of flute-playing. You only learn to be good by practising goodness under the discipline, and sometimes even the punishment of the laws of goodness. There is a stage at which the child has to be habituated, and even compelled, into goodness -- only after he has reached the stage of habituation is it possible to trust him with freedom.

God is our Heavenly Father. God's been trying to get that through to us from the very beginning. And if I were to apply the imagery of the Pennsylvania Dutch to the mind of God, I could hear him say to us, "Why are you so long so dumb, so short so smart?" - - - "I have been telling you these things all along the line, ever from the very beginning..... "

...think of the Garden of Eden -- how idyllic the imagery is that comes immediately to your mind -- the Garden of Eden -- and even in the Garden of Eden -- God the Creator of the world says to man, as a Heavenly Father: "This is a no-no -- enjoy! make the most of it, but this is something you shall not do.

...and having endowed us with the freedom of choice, God Himself has His moments when He stands back and sees what damned fools we can make of ourselves.

God, if we may apply the figure of speech to Him, stands there and wrings His hands and bows His head and cries out sorely - - - "When - - when will they ever learn?" To keep us from tripping ourselves up, and out of love, authoritatively speaking, He says, "These are the rules."

I am a regular reader of a Roman Catholic publication called "Our Sunday Visitor." A man, I think by the name of Jim Langdon, has a column which I read avidly. Some time ago he was reminiscing as to what his life was like before he became a column writer. He had an interesting position with a certain company that manufactured games, and his responsibility was to write the rules for the games. Somebody would design the game, somebody would contrive it in his mind, and then they would manufacture it. But before it went on the market they had to determine how the game can be best played.

.....and he'd experiment. And he'd set down certain rules. And then he'd invite some of his friends into his office or his studio and he'd tell them about the game, and he'd watch them play it.....and as he observed them and saw the mistakes they made, he'd benefit by that and write them into the rules eventually,

as the game went on the shelf in the store.

And then sometimes he'd invite some of his friends into his home and he'd tell them about the game, and then he'd say, "Here, I'd like you to play it. Let's see how it goes. Tell me what you think of it." And there would be always those who would say, "Well, where are the rules?" - - - and he'd discover that when they played by the rules they were happy and thoroughly enjoyed the game. But on occasion he'd have some folks who'd completely disregard the rules -- he'd say, "Here they are." But they'd say, "No, we're going to try it without the rules.....we're going to play it our way." And inevitably he'd discover that when people did it that way, they became bored, they didn't enjoy it, and sometimes became very, very angry.

I'm reluctant to say it to you, but give me the liberty for the moment: God is like a maker-of-games . . .

...now let me say quickly, God is the giver of life, He knows how it's to be played....He knows the way to achieve success. He knows how we can make the most of the experience. When we don't

I used to hear people say something about breaking the Ten Commandments. I'm not sure that's the way to put it. You don't break the Ten Commandments. This is what happens: when you don't obey them, they break you! Life itself proves it.

Now the first Commandment:

"I am the Lord thy God. You shall have no other gods before me."

Man is always the god-maker, you know that. We're always enthroning something, or someone. There is always something that we worship. I'm not going to take your time nor spend my energy in talking to you about the gods we worship. God knows we'll do it. God knows we'll always place a high value on something or someone. And so at the very beginning, to spare us a lot of mistakes, He says, "I am the Lord your God. Keep me first."

You know how this whole business of believing in God began, surely you do. Historically there was poly-theism. Man who believes in God believed in many gods. He had a god for almost anything, you name it. Then he advances to a certain stage in his religious experience where he had a national god, a god that belonged particularly to his own people, to his own tribe. And this was one god of many gods. His god was not the only god, but his god but his god existed alongside of other gods, some good, some bad.

And then you had this exceedingly precious moment in history when Moses codifies the law. And God talks in terms to His own children of only one God. And that's how monotheism became part of the picture. You can't divide your loyalties, even when you think in terms of God. And in language that we might understand even to the end of time, Jehovah says, "I am a jealous God! I won't allow you to afford to share me, because there is none like our God"-- the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm reminded, Southy once wrote a poem. He tells of the abbot in the monastery who put a bell on a dangerous rock to warn incoming vessels. A roving pirate once sacked the town and cast the bell into the sea. Years later, as the story goes, on a wild and stormy night, this same pirate tried to steer his way into the harbor, but he listened in vain for the bell on the rock which would have given him his bearings. And he and his ship went down to an ocean grave.

I say to you as earnestly as I can, we are ourselves responsible for many of our defeats simply because we have cast off our consciences. We blindly ignore their warnings until they shrivel and die. We have so accustomed ourselves to doubtful/^{moral} practices that we think we have outsmarted the laws of God. Then in our hours of strongest temptation we find ourselves adrift, with nothing to guide us to safety. A good educated Christian conscience is a good thing to keep alive against the time when it alone may stand between us and disaster.

So God gives us the Ten Commandments, the chief of which is:

"I am the Lord your God"

...and He keeps holding us by it: "Remember!" "Remember!" "Think first in terms of 'No!'" And when we have the grace and strength to do it we save ourselves from a lot of grief. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO LOSE THIS SENSE OF REVERENCE"

(Second in the Series of Sermons on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Exodus 20:1

The name of Lorin Wade probably doesn't mean much, if anything, to you. But you ought to give her some heed, if only momentarily, during these prefatory remarks. Let me tell you how she first came to my attention.

She was one of fifteen -- fifteen people had been chosen by a distinguished British journalist from Fleet Street to present a series of articles dealing with the way they observed the contemporary scene: specifically, How do you think people think about God? -- and the authority that belongs to God? And also, how do you assess the contemporary scene, from the stand-point of morality?

The articles were submitted.

The man in charge gave top marks to Lorin Wade -- a surprising thing because she had just turned twenty years of age at the time she wrote her article. Why was she so recognized? From his standard, she more than any others presented the strongest protest against the loosening of moral standards.....twenty years of age when she wrote her article.....and she also presented the strongest plea for the recognition of the necessity of rules and regulations and law.

You may be a bit uncomfortable when I tell you that in the article that she wrote, as I understand it, she was quite deliberate as she rebuked the Church. She appealed to the Church to stand its ground, not to compromise, not to retreat. Some of us who try to put our finger on the spiritual pulsebeat of the Church today lament the fact that it seems as though the Church does try to compromise with the world, tries to meet the world half-way. If the world doesn't come up to the standards which we are meant to proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ and

according to Biblical truth -- then let's wink, or adjust ourselves downward to where the world happens to be.

I must confess to you that I don't believe that in the final analysis that the world really respects us when this happens. There was the cartoonist, you know, who cleverly pictures the boys in the barracks making some reference to the padre who had been with them -- the kind of person who feels that he has to be as one of the boys, who leans over backward not to let his clerical collar show, who lowers his standards. As the chaplain leaves, according to the cartoonist, one soldier says to the other, "If it's anything that I can't stand, it's this unholier-than-thou attitude!"

Now back to Lorin Wade and her article. These are some of the things to which she which she addressed herself:

- one, divorce is on the increase. Observation: the Church all too often says, let marriages, then, be made more flexible, less demanding in what we expect from a marriage. And let's say nothing harsh of those who live together without the benefit of marriage.
- she tackles the fact that immorality is common . . . and then she rebukes the Church for saying that pre-marital intercourse is not necessarily wrong . . .
- she recognizes the fact that illegitimacy is on the increase -- and therefore she came down heavy on the part of those within the Church who without any qualification whatever favor abortion . . .
- she recognizes the fact that murder is on the increase -- and therefore she rebukes the Church for not taking a stand in favor of more rigid sentencing....

...so Lorin Wade surveys the contemporary scene. Undoubtedly many of you will not fully agree with what she's observed. But I dare say if you listen to me now, as I share with you an analogy that has come fresh from her thinking as

she regards the necessity for rules and regulations and authority -- I quote directly:

"If everyone is fouling like mad in a game of soccer, the athletic association does not automatically change the rules so that those who are doing so can continue to play a dirty game within the law. Even if everyone except one player is fouling, they would still of necessity base their rule judging on how they think the game should be played and not how they think it is being played. You do not scrap the rules just because some people prefer to ignore them or to reject them."

That's why, God willing, I shall be coming back to this pulpit repeatedly during these weeks ahead to talk to you about God's rules -- God's regulations -- the authority that belongs to Him.

In conversation with one of our choir members between the last service and this he was kind enough to give me the benefit of some of his reading in which he shared with me the thought that a man who is well versed in the contemporary scene predicted the day when the Church will again declare in no uncertain terms the recognition of the authority of God.

A wit once observed that it took God one night to get Israel out of Egyptbut it took Him forty years to get Egypt out of Israel! Forty years -- that's a whole generation, at least in those days. And it may take us a whole generation to get us back to where we belong in this appreciation for the Ten Commandments. I said to you last Sunday in the initial sermon that every generation needs to discover anew and for itself the validity of the Ten Commandments, to begin at the point where God says: "This is it!"

Today it's the Second Commandment in the brief time that remains:

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain."

What, I ask you now -- think carefully -- what, I ask you now, is your most cherished, ^{private} ~~private~~ and personal possession? Now think. What is your cherished, your most treasured private and personal possession?

I'm going to answer the question for you and answer it for you sublimely in the words of Dr. Edgar Carlson, who at one time was President of our Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Presumably speaking in general terms on the Catechism, and touching on the Ten Commandments in particular, he said to the college students in chapel one day, "Your name is your most cherished, private and personal possession. Other people may have the same name, and other people may spell it the same way, but your name, when spoken and meant for you, is your most personal and private possession. To all intents and purposes, then, you are equated with your name. Your name is yours."

God has a name. He does not prefer to be nameless. He is always telling us who He is and what He's done and what He's been up to. He's always revealing Himself. He wants us to know exactly who He is. And that's why for our benefit He revealed Himself fully and completely in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul said it so well -- "In him" (meaning Jesus Christ) "---- all the fullness of God dwells." God wants us to know exactly who He is.

There was a time, as some of you may know, in the development of the Children of Israel, in the human race and their knowledge of God, according to the Hebrew tradition, when men did not pronounce the name of God. They respected it that much -- they felt themselves unworthy, as God gave them to understand it, to use His name. And then after a while God, out of love for us, lets us have His name, and you won't forget, He goes so far as to give us His name.

Now God says, "My name is to be kept holy."

Now you can spell that either way, both ways -- holy or wholly -- wholly His. It belongs to none other. And when you think of God's name, we're meant to think in terms of who God is. For remember now, you equate the name with the person: the person is the name -- the name is the person. It can't be otherwise. If somebody says something unkind about you, and they use your name, you can't hide behind the fact and say, "They weren't talking about me -- they were just talking about my name." Now God had brought the Children of Israel to a particular point. He knew exactly what was ahead for them, and He also knew what would happen to them if they would forget Him -- who He is and what He is. So He said, "You keep paramount in your thinking who I am -- whenever you think of me and my name, you keep it holy. You don't abuse it, you don't misuse it, you don't drag it in the dust. For your sake!"

For He gave them to understand that whenever they were to think of Him they were to think of Him as He is -- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who brought them out of Egypt, the God who freed them from Pharaoh's hand, the God who parted the Red Sea.....the God who led them into the Promised Land by day and by night, giving them some token.....the God who gave them manna from heaven....the God who gave them Moses and Joshua.....

.....not only the God who was the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but the God who was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who also has a name, a name which is above every name -- a name which means He shall be our Saviour, to free us from our sins - - - all these things are to come to our mind when we think of God, lest we forget, we forget at great peril. So God says, "Be careful how you use my name because this will indicate how you think of me!"

words are important. The little girl was absolutely right when she says, "How do I know what I think until I first say it?" Let me find myself in the

company of people where silence reigns, and then somebody begins to speak -- and as soon as somebody begins to speak, unless he's plagued by hypocrisy, I can tell immediately something of that person's character, where he is and where he's coming from. Words are that important. And God says, "Be careful then, when you use words, how you use my name, because as you use these words people will know what you think of me."

Let me give you as succinctly as I can the most relevant of all examples. What would you think of a person, if when he was inclined to swear, to curse, or to be profane -- would use the name of his mother? -- the woman who gave him life, the woman who cradled him in her arms, the woman who follows him to the very grave.....the woman who loves as no other person in this world can love him. What would you think of her? What would you think of the man who would use her name as he curses, as he swears, as he speaks profanely?

God has feelings, too. And our character is revealed by the way we speak the name of God. I can't tell you now who it was, whether it was the President of Yale or Harvard, who at one time said the mark of a truly educated man is the mark that lies in his willingness to speak the name of God without reluctance, and with respect.

My last word concerning this Commandment to you is this, as Luther interprets it for us: "We should so fear and love God as not to curse, swear, conjure, lie, or deceive, but call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving."

....it isn't very decent of a chap who eventually will be driven to his knees and will have to call upon the name of God, who up to that time has dragged the very name into the dust.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Sheheen
The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 16, 1978

"HALO-FOR A DAY"

(Third in a Series based on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Ed notes 20:8

As a tourist in England some years back, I remember seeing the very clever cartoon designed for the London, Midland and Scotland Railroad, for presumably the people in charge of that railroad were fully aware of the fact that there were only two kinds of travelers -- those who remember to take their luggage with them, and those who can forget. To counter that sort of thing, especially those who are inclined to forget and then cause a burden for the officials of the railroad company, as part of their propaganda they had this very clever poster. It was the caricature of an elephant, presumably who never forgets -- but there was a note tied onto his tail.....and underneath this inscription:
"HAVE YOU LEFT ANYTHING BEHIND?"

People who travel through life are in duty bound to ask themselves the question every now and then: Do I have everything with me that rightfully belongs to me? Do I have everything with me now that I ought to continue to take as I continue my journey? Is there anything that I've left behind?

The proverbial elephant who never forgets anything may still in this rapid age of ours need to have a note tied onto his tail. For those of us who travel through life in this mad and terrific pace which becomes our generation of necessity must be reminded again and again: have we left anything behind? Is there something in the past that we ought not to leave there? Is there something that we've received along the line that's meant to be continued with us and we are still to be recognizing it as something useful, without which we ought not to be able to continue our journey.

It's in this manner and this mood that I come again to this sacred desk as we continue a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments. For most certainly the Ten Commandments come to us out of the past. But as I read the mind of God, with whatever sensitivity He gives me, the Ten Commandments were not intended to be left behind us. God has not changed His mind, they are still meant to be useful. We ought not to continue our journey through life without them.

When I go to Manhattan there are many things that I enjoy seeing. There are two places, however, that if at all possible I want always to include in the stay, no matter how brief it may be. Both of them are churches: one of them, on 5th Avenue, in my judgment the most magnificent of all Gothic churches in this part of the world, St. Thomas.....the other is St. Bartholomew Church on Park Avenue. The rector there wrote a book a few years back. A friend gave it to me. I was thumbing through its pages not so long ago, and in that book he reflects about an experience that he had had with a couple who had invited him into their home.

They had been married for some time, but now they had moved into this, their new home -- contemporary from the word go. And as he went from room to room he soon discovered that the decor and the furnishings were all contemporary. He found no fault with that. And then as they finished in the kitchen, where they had a cup of coffee, he looked out through the window and saw beyond the breezeway the garage, with two cars parked in the driveway. And he jokingly said, "You build a garage and you keep your cars on the outside -- it doesn't make sense." And the woman said, "Oh, but we use the garage. This house doesn't have an attic, and so the garage serves as an attic for us. The garage is the modern-day adaptation of the old attic."

And they said to him, "Perhaps you'd like to finish your tour by going to

the garage with us." And as they went they showed him a number of old pieces, and his eye fell on one in particular -- he knew what it was, it came out of his generation and the generation before him. It was a chiffonier. (now that's a chest of drawers, isn't it?) And he said, "Tell me about this piece -- even its name sounds strange in this, our day. But tell me about it."

And the young woman or the woman of the house said, "It's an heirloom. It belonged to my grandparents, and I remember how when I visited in their home they used it. And I recall so very well the very place where it was located. Then my grandparents wanted my parents to have it, and as I was growing up in my home we used it too, we had a place for it. And then dad and mother broke up housekeeping, they wanted us to have it. So we brought it along with us, and we've used it. But now that we've moved into this contemporary house, and with our contemporary furniture, it seems to be out of place, it just doesn't fit. But out of respect for my parents and my grandparents, we can't quite give it up. So we've stored it in the garage, we've put it aside, and that's where it is now."

I suggest to you that there's a parable here. Could it be that that's the way it is with the Ten Commandments? -- something valued in the past, something that our grandparents and parents themselves respected, something used and cherished by them -- somehow for us moderns we can get along without it.

We just don't need this set of rules. It doesn't quite fit our modern way of thinking and our modern way of living. Yet, nonetheless, we can't quite give the Ten Commandments up, so we'll store them somewhere -- respectfully we'll tuck them away.

Could it be that that's the purpose that the Church serves -- we tuck the Ten Commandments away in the Church, and are quite content to allow the Church to become the custodian of the Ten Commandments, the custodian of something

that comes out of the past, an heirloom -- something valued in a day that has come and gone. But we, we're not about to make full use of it. We can get along without it. We'll store them somewhere else.

If this is a generalization that can be made about the whole series of the Ten Commandments, it's most particularly true about the Commandment that we're about to study now:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to
keep it holy."

....we won't have done with it completely, but yet we won't place the same value upon it that our forefathers did.

Some years back when I visited Charlotte, North Carolina, our host was driving us around the business area. And then when we came to a certain store he stopped and he said, "Now I want you to pay attention to this store -- " He said, "There's something unusual about it." Well the appearance on that day wasn't at all unusual.

He said, "Let me tell you about it. That store was owned and operated by a man who was a God-fearing individual, he was of the old school, and he had a great regard for the Ten Commandments, and particularly for the one that deals with the Lord's Day. It was his rule that when Sunday came, the shades would be drawn, the curtains would be drawn, and if you passed his store on Sunday, you couldn't even have the benefit of browsing and looking at the merchandise. So rigidly did he adhere to this Commandment!"

I was just told since this sermon was preached at 8:30 by a person who heard it that such a practice was followed a number of years ago by Woodward and Lothrop here in the Nation's Capital. But it's gone by the board now, you know it has. And now we have the open Sunday on our hand, where many

places of business are open and we're encouraged to shop...and there are even advertisements that read: "These bargains are SUNDAY ONLY bargains."

...we've come a long way from the drawing of the curtains and the pulling of the shades...

Now what's to be said about this Commandment? The key word of course is remember. That's what God's always saying to us: Don't you dare forget! Because there are some things we need to remember. It is only as we know the stock from which we stem that we're really able to fulfill our role in life. God is saying to us: "Remember who I am" - - - and that's why the first three Commandments deal basically with God Himself - - - for all that follows has little meaning unless we first recognize God, the fact of God, the nature of God, His name, and His day remember.

The word Sabbath really means "to come to a halt -- to break off -- to stop." And that's how the old Jew understood it. He began by remembering that God created the heavens and the earth in six days...and then on the seventh day He came to a stop -- He broke off. And is it too much to suggest that in having done that, He took time to reflect upon what had been done, and the purpose for which it had been done. That's exactly why we have one day in seven that's set aside with a 'halo-of-sorts' in order to bring things in true and proper perspective, in order to concentrate anew upon the fact of God, as to who we are and whose we are and what we are meant to be.

One thing needs to be clearly established at the outset. I don't get up-tight at all about this business of its being the first day or the seventh, really I don't. And when my Seventh Day Adventist friends try to get me into an argument on this point, I have little enthusiasm to pursue it. Really now, to settle at this level can cloud the basic issue of the 'first' or the 'seventh' day, for all seven days of the week are important to God. And because this is true, and because He wants us to understand that He holds us accountable for

what we do in and with all seven, He has placed a 'halo-of-sorts- on one day in particular. It is on this day that we are meant to get all the others in proper perspective.

Now this shouldn't be difficult for you. Why do we celebrate anniversaries, why do we celebrate birthdays? Isn't it true that on a birthday, properly observed, you and I recognize that someone gave us life. If we're not inclined to think about it at other times, then properly in observing our birthday we recognize that somebody gave us life, and that someone in our infancy stood over us and cradled us and guided us and nurtured us. We need to remember these things. That's exactly why it seems to me that God gave this Commandment: Remember -- on this day in particular, what I have done for you -- I created the world -- I gave you life.

The envy of some of you grandparents, presumably, Winifred and I deeply appreciate the fact that we can see our grandsons as often as we can. And I reflect in your presence now and muse how, when both of them were brought home from the hospital after they had been born, and they stayed a great period in our home, I can still see each of them, little more than a week old, not being able to do practically anything for himself.....even a pair of hands had to turn him over. When our birthdays come around, we do well to properly recognize what's been done for us in the past -- who gave us life and who sustained us through these days and years of our life. The old Jew broke off one day in the week to remember what God had done for him.

It was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God had delivered him out of Egypt....it was on that one day of the week when he remembered how God led him through the wilderness.....it was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God gave him manna from heaven.....it was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God gave him Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was on that one day in the week when he reminded himself of the

covenant which God had made and said, "I will be to you and you will be to me in a way that I will not be to any other people." And the Jew is what he is today because he is remembering he survives as a nation because he remembers who he is and what God has done for him.

And by the same token the Christian -- for a while he observed the seventh day of the week, and then it occurred to him that it was on the first day of the week that God had done something for him, He left the grave empty. And from that time on, as Christians began to realize this and to remember it, they said, "We will make the first day of the week as an Easter, and all of our worship experience, it will be on the first day of the week that we will look back and we will remember what Jesus Christ has done for us..."

-- they remembered it was on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to them, and banded them together into the Family of God...and that gave them the Holy Christian Church....
....they said, "We will look back and we will remember - - " that's how the first day of the week came to mean so much to us, because on that day they looked back and they remembered.

If you want rules and regulations, if you want rigidity, my friend, when I think of keeping this Commandment, it isn't so much what you shouldn't do as much as it is what you ought to do. And that's why God gives the Commandment: Remember - - - remember me, and what I have done for you -- break off! Stop! Bring to a halt.....take time to think fully of me." This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 23, 1978

"AS GOD'S AGENTS"
(Series on the Ten Commandments -- IV)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Exodus 20:12

It was an article that appeared in the American Scholar and was written
some time ago by Louis Kronberger. This is what he had to say:

"Ours is not so much an age of vulgarity as of
vulgarization. Everything is tampered with,
touched up, adulterated, or watered down in an
effort to make it pay. What we need for cultural
health today is what we needed and got for our
physical health when we established the Pure
Food and Drug Laws."

What we need now, thought Louis Kronberger, is a kind of "Pure Thought and
Feeling Law."

I don't know how many people may have responded to the article, but I
would hope that somewhere there was a preacher who wrote and said, "My good
friend, we have had such a set of laws for over two thousand years -- they
are known as the Ten Commandments." But in our worship of the gods of elec-
tronics and jet propulsion we've forgotten the God of the Ten Commandments,
we've forgotten the God of the Sermon on the Mount. Regardless, I say to you,
of the complicity of the modern world, there can be no substitute for plain,
every-day personal honesty, for sobriety, for industry, for purity, for
truthfulness. We are absolutely stupid if we think we can outgrow the plain
virtues. It is absolute folly to ignore them. No artificial probes of
government, of science or economics can support for long a society that is
morally rotten at the grass roots. The plain virtues are the keys to human
happiness, the building blocks of a healthy society.

-- that's my introductory remark to you as we come today to
another in the series of sermons being preached on the Ten Commandments.

Now we do well to keep in mind that there are those who maintain, and rightfully so, that you can divide the Ten Commandments into two groups. The first group is this one: the set of Commandments that deals specifically with our relationship to God, a kind of vertical relationship: God and the individual. God says to each of us: "I am God -- don't forget it! And don't make any graven images, and don't misuse my name, or abuse it....and remember, there's one day in the week in which you especially think of Me, that you might recognize My claim upon the other six days in the week"

...so the first set of Commandments deals specifically with God....His Name....and His Day.

Then the others deal primarily with our relationship to our fellow men, a kind of horizontal arrangement. We are to treat others according to our relationship with God.

Now you're not forgetting, are you, that as God was having the Children of Israel led toward the Promised Land, and as they wandered through the wilderness, in His plan for them they came to an abrupt halt. He said, now you've got to stop here a minute and you've got to understand some things before you go any farther -- because they were to be surrounded by other people who did not pattern their lives according to the life-style of the Chosen People. And this is what caused them to run into trouble. So God takes their leader to Mt. Sinai and there reveals to him what he in turn gave to them -- Ten Commandments. Not 'Ten Suggestions'.....not 'Ten options'.....not ten possibilities among other things as far as God's concerned, to say, "If you don't mind, give this some measure of consideration. But ten rules, ten regulations, -- Ten Commandments -- given for our sake. God needs no ego-satisfaction....but for our sakes.

You can't live in a world without authority. You can't live in a world without rules and regulations and laws. I wouldn't want to be part of a group of people who didn't have some respect for certain basic rules and regulations, who didn't have some respect for authority. We've gone through that period, you know, when we thought we could sack authority, when each man could do his own thing and completely ignore an authoritative voice that spoke in behalf of everybody else. But deep inside each one of us there is the recognition of the need for rule and regulation. When you leave this place this morning, and wherever you're parked, if you'll head for Colesville Road, you'll thank God, of course you will, that there happens to be some measure of regulation for the highway or for the street that's out there -- you come to the intersection, there's a sign that says STOP... and if you're driving down Colesville Road, you ought to thank God that there's that sign, some semblance of rule and authority that works in your behalf.

....or you're driving on Colesville Road -- there are the lanes carefully delineated, and you drive with some measure of satisfaction because you believe that other people recognize the fact that one stays in his lane -- for everyone else's good, lest you jeopardize the safety of somebody else . . .

So God in our behalf lays down the law for our good.

Now today we come to the consideration of another one of the Ten Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy life may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Isn't it significant that the very first commandment that God lays down regarding society is a law that affects the family? -- the relationship between children and parents, and parents and children. It makes sense, doesn't it? What is society but an extension of the family? What is society but the family of man? And if we're going to

behave as part of the family of man, we have to learn to behave properly as part of our own family. And we begin with respect for authority -- we give honor and respect to those who are over us. Martin Luther, bless his soul, went on to say that this commandment doesn't apply simply to parents, but it applies to all those who have authority over us -- teachers....judges....of-ficers....a Sunday School teacher.

Now if you have a gambling instinct, let me say to you in such an unconventional way as part of the sermon, where would you place your wager right now as the preacher talks to you about this commandment that deals with the interplay between parents and children? -- where is he going to lower the boom? -- on the kids.....or on the parents? You don't know, do you? But I do.

I have been wrestling with this very thing. It could be a very easy thing for me to come to this sacred desk this morning and to come down very heavy upon the younger generation. There's nothing new about this generation gap, there's nothing new about this lack of respect on the part of kids for their elders. The cleavage between the generations is no new thing. It seems to have been part and parcel of life all through history. Here is a well-known quotation -- listen to it:

"The world is passing through troublous times. The young people today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint, they talk as if they knew everything. And what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for girls, they are forward -- immodest -- unwomanly in speech, behaviour, dress . . ."

...am I quoting you from this morning's paper? Yesterday's paper? I could have, perhaps, as a modern-day columnist would write in that fashion. But what I have just read for you is a quotation from a sermon preached in 1274. The problem has always been with us, that the young ought to give respect to their elders.

But I have no intention to come down heavy on the younger generation. Nor do I have any intent to come down heavy on the older generation. I would pray

God that I could speak evenly to both, because I think that's the way the commandment has to be seen.

Now for parents to get it in proper perspective, let me remind you that there are some things that God can't do by Himself. In fact, very few things God ever does by Himself and by Himself alone, unaided. He knows what He wants, and in order to have His plan advanced and His purpose fulfilled, He needs and uses people to assist Him. His preferred instrument is always a human being. Aside from creation, name some of the things that God has done by Himself. Oh, every now and then there's some dramatic evidence, but by and large He's always reaching for a person through whom to work. And that's where parents come into the picture -- He needs us.

Now those of us who are parents and grandparents need to understand it this way: we are God's agents, we're God's representatives, we are to be to our children and to our grandchildren as God! Now that's awesome, but it's absolutely true.

What is that simple definition that we have for God? God is love. And how does God manifest His love except through people? And so God uses people to love, and He begins with those who are nearest and dearest to Him, He begins with the parents, and He says to the parents: "Now you deal with this child as I would deal with this child!

You understand it, don't you, when God wanted to come to us, perfectly and completely, what did He do? He decided to come in human form. And in order to come in human form He turned to two people -- to Mary and to Joseph. And He said, "Now I entrust Jesus to your keeping. You are to cradle Him in your arms, you are to bathe Him, you are to feed Him, you're to direct His course through life."

.....and then think of that exceedingly precious moment when some people came to Jesus one day and they were troubled with this whole busi-

ness of the basic nature and character of God -- "Give us some imagery, tell us what God is like!" And Joseph, God bless him, must have done his work so well that without any hesitation, without any reluctance at all, Jesus said, "Well I'll tell you what God is like -- He's like a father." And every father, every mother is to be as God to their children, to share love and to share trust.

Now, wouldn't it be wonderful if we were all perfect people? But parents are not perfect. And youngsters are not perfect. And that's part of the problem. I say this to you quite parenthetically, I don't know of any facet of the work of the ministry that I dislike, and I am profoundly grateful. Which means I know equal joy in my soul to the working with young people, and I covet for myself the kind of thing that happens in these interviews at Bethany these Sunday afternoons, tedious as it may be from 3:00 until 8:00 o'clock, after a demanding day here in the morning. But it's a precious thing to touch base with them. Not very often, but every now and then a youngster will come to me, taking very seriously the Commandments, and saying, "Pastor,

(not very often now, hear me completely,
but every now and then)

-- "Pastor, I don't know what to do . . .

(they may not phrase it exactly this way)

...." -- but I can't respect my parents." And I know anguish in my soul when I hear them talk like that, because I know parents are not perfect.

And I suppose a sign of maturity is when you and I recognize that our parents were not perfect people. I remember the rude awakening in my soul when I discovered that about my parents, and I shudder with I think how our two sons must deal with that rude awakening when they think of me. We are not perfect. But by the grace of God we're meant to do the best we can, despite our imperfection. And so I plead with any youngster who is prone to say, "I can't respect my parents" -- to admit that they're not perfect, nor is he perfect, and if he

April 30, 1978

"THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE"
(from the Series based on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY AND Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Evangel 20:13

I don't know what thoughts ran through your minds as you were listening to the anthem, but one of the things that crossed my mind as I listened to the very first phrase that the choir sang was that it was the exact same words as the beginning sentence of today's Gospel.....and then I had a thought -- I wonder how many people listening now connect the two and feel as if there is any way it would be related to the sermon? Now, dare I ask how many of you remember the first sentence of today's Gospel?...or what the choir sang at the beginning of the anthem:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Let's not forget that for a moment as I call to your attention the fact that when people go through the newspaper looking for a new automobile, like as not they are careful to read the small print because there it's stated what guarantees come with the purchase that they'd like to make. You know, when car manufacturers sell cars, they usually put their guarantee on them -- two years - 24,000 miles, whichever comes first. Sometimes the guarantee is more....sometimes the guarantee is less. But you know what happens when that time or the mileage runs out: you're left entirely on your own.

Now in comparison to that, when you give a gift to someone you really care for, something different happens. You don't just give the gift and then turn your back on the person you gave it to. You want to see if the person enjoys the gift, and you don't turn your back on the gift, either -- you're anxious to find out if it really works, and you see to it that no one takes it away from the person that you gave it to.

expects perfection from his parents, he must remember how disappointed they may be if they attempt to expect perfection from him.

In the sight of God we are all children. But the fact remains, however, that for our sake God says to parents: You should be honored and you should be respected, and children should give this kind of honor and respect to you. But we have to earn the right to be respected. And that's the great problem that all of us parents have.

Now let's get back to this whole business again to be to children as God, to be to children as one who loves. And love is always to meet the need of another person. And I am absolutely convinced that when love can have its sway, when love can be given a chance, it's always respected. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 30, 1978

"THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE"
(from the Series based on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY AND Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Evolution 20:13

I don't know what thoughts ran through your minds as you were listening to the anthem, but one of the things that crossed my mind as I listened to the very first phrase that the choir sang was that it was the exact same words as the beginning sentence of today's Gospel.....and then I had a thought -- I wonder how many people listening now connect the two and feel as if there is any way it would be related to the sermon? Now, dare I ask how many of you remember the first sentence of today's Gospel?...or what the choir sang at the beginning of the anthem:

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That's how God gives us life -- not like a car manufacturer, who has to worry about his profit....but like a lover, who wants to take care of the one that he loves, the gift that he gives. I say this to you as an introductory statement to this sermon that's being preached in the series on the Ten Commandments. And today it's the Fifth Commandment that we give our attention to. It's the Commandment that consists of only four words: You shall not kill.

Do you remember last week that a way of dividing the Commandments was called to our attention. The first three have to do with our relationship to God -- a kind of vertical arrangement; and the remaining seven are thought of in a horizontal fashion -- commandments having to do with our relationships with one another. Having said something to us about where life begins -- in the Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother -- God follows us now in the Fifth Commandment, out of the door of our house, to say something about life and the way we live it with our neighbors.

It ought to be understood from the very beginning -- life is seen by God as something sacred. In fact from the very beginning the Biblical witness is that God is a creator. The Genesis stories tell us that God created the world, the highest and the greatest part of His creation being man. He places a high priority on human life, and man is to have rule over all the creation, and he's entrusted by God to care for it.

Need further evidence of the high value God places on human life? When God chose to come into the world -- in the fullest sense of the word He chose to come in the form of a person. Yet life, as it's related to God, is often mysterious. There's a lot about it that we don't understand. Who among us hasn't had a moment or two when we wondered why we were born? or what purpose our life might serve? or what the future holds for us? or why we have to endure a particular kind of experience? One would have to be insensitive indeed, wouldn't he, to stand at the point of birth, or at the point of death, and not be greatly

moved by a sense of mystery? What a tragedy for a person to live out his days and never come to grips with the fact that their life counts! It's been said that there are two great moments in the life of any person: there is the moment when he is born into the world.....and then there's the moment when he discovers why.

To know that your life has a purpose, that behind everything that you do there's a meaning -- that's what makes life worth living. If life only has meaning for us when we can see it in relationship with something else, and when you can link together the giver and the gift, then a big piece of the puzzle of life fits together.

So let's keep in mind, then, that from God's point of view -- life is sacred, and every one of us is taken seriously by God. And what we do with our life matters to Him, and life as God sees it is always in terms of relationships.

It's a fact, so psychologists tell us, and it's Scriptural too, that no one can be true to himself unless he has a loving relationship to other people. It's also true, isn't it, that we are shaped by those who love us and those who refuse to love us. Now think about that for a minute -- -- who are the people in your life that have made you what you are? Have you ever noticed the difference that it makes this time of the year when the bloom of spring captures someone's heart because someone else pays attention to them? Spring is the time when a young man's heart turns to love . . . it makes a difference, doesn't it?

Or, have you ever noticed the difference that it makes when someone's been rejected, and the spring's been taken out of their step? You see, life is so relational -- me-to-you -- you-to-me -- you-to-somebody-else.....and so it goes. And when God gives the Commandments He recognizes the fact that we have a relationship within our home. So the Fourth Commandment deals with father and mother. But then there is the recognition of the fact that we live in a larger family. And so there's the Fifth Commandment that has to do with the fact that we live

as part of the family of man.

Sometimes it takes a disaster to remind us of this fact that we're all related to one another. But not too many years ago that point was driven home even within the membership of this congregation, when we could not stand by and know that within two hours' drive from here there were people whose lives were devastated when that terrible storm called Agnes took its toll, and week after week, carload after carload -- how many numbers of people were there, who made the trek northward to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to help people dig out of the mud, to recover from the flood -- people whose names we did not know. But all that really mattered was that they had a desperate need. They were our neighbors . . . we could not stand idly by.

But you might be thinking to yourself at this point: What does all of this have to do with the Fifth Commandment? For doesn't the Commandment read: You shall not kill -- responding to a disaster or looking upon someone else as a brother or sister of the human family -- what's that have to do with killing?...or with murder?

What do you suppose the results would be if you were to conduct a poll this morning and ask people what they think is the most important of the Ten Commandments? I'd be willing to bet that it would be this one. For who among us wants to live in a world where life does not have value and where killing and murder goes on without restraint? So then, if we place such a high priority on keeping this Commandment, what's to be said about it?

Would you believe me if I told you that this Commandment, as Luther explained it, has much more to do with murder than the taking of another's life....and if you're anticipating some word this morning about capital punishment, euthanasia, or any other such related to that, you're probably going to be disappointed. What this Commandment focuses upon is much more basic to the daily contact that we have with each other. Surely what it has to deal with provides

a basis for wrestling with some of the more complex issues of life. Because first and foremost the Commandment reminds us that all life is sacred. It's created, it's given by God.

But what about the second part of the Commandment in terms of keeping it? What is it that kills? A couple of years ago there was a best seller that was made into a movie called "The Anatomy of a Murder." It was a story that took apart, step by step, what it was that brought an end to a victim. And the interplay between the characters, the way they treated one another -- that's what made the story so interesting and full of suspense.

But the anatomy of any murder begins in the heart. The thought is the father of the deed. And if you need a few examples, here are a couple . . .

-- you know, a person can kill by rejection. For some people that's the cruelest blow that life can deal, to be ignored, to try to live as if you do not matter at all to somebody else, that your life doesn't count.....why should you go on? . . .

-- you know, a person can kill enthusiasm. You watch what kind of reaction you get sometimes when somebody comes running to you because they have a new idea that they've just discovered something.....and you tell them that it's stupid, or that it's already been thought of by somebody before....or what they have to say isn't worth listening to . . .

-- and oh, if looks could kill -- just the way we look sometimes at one another can be devastating. Have you ever had the experience of looking into someone's eyes that were filled with anger? What a crushing blow that can be to the human spirit -- such a strong message is being communicated without a single word being spoken.

And the list could go on: malice.....gossip -- that's a good one: gossip --

how many people have been killed by gossip, suffered from character assassination? What a cruel way to die, and have your reputation ruined by lies, crude talk, and anger and anger -- there's another one. The world would be a sorry place if every angry thought resulted in a deed. We take a lot of comfort, don't we, in the fact that we don't do what we have a mind to do. . . . there is name-calling....we tell ethnic stories so the list could go on! The intent of the heart is more serious than the deed itself.

And if you want to argue that point, then you're going to have to take on Jesus Christ himself, because He laid the cards on the table with those who thought they were living within the law. You might remember that in the Sermon on the Mount He said to them: "You have heard it said that men of old, you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment . . ." I mean, after all, He was familiar with the Jewish law, and He did know that it provided some very severe punishment for those who took another person's life . . . "But I say to you," Jesus said, as He made broader implication of the Commandment, "that anyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment, and whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council . . ." Now that's putting it on the line! God judges not only what we do, but our motives for doing it. He's concerned about what lies in the heart, to insult another person, to show contempt for him, to look down on a person with a sneer as though he were inferior to you - - then you're ignoring God's will that we accept all people as He does.

But no matter what a person may be like - - and here's the hard part for some people to swallow - - he's loved by God. He's not completely worthless, and you cannot write him off as though he did not exist.

It's easy to love your friends, but you get down to the nitty-gritty of this Commandment and you talk about expressing some kind of concern for your enemy, and basic to all this Commandment by recognizing that life belongs to God, and that it's not cheap, and a price has been paid for it, and that it

has value. And it cannot be taken for granted as though it doesn't matter.

Do you know that studies show that by the time a young person graduates from high school he has seen more than 18,000 murders on television . . . do you think it's possible that a person can become immune to the value of life? Do we live in such a world that detachment is the social norm? And no one wants to get involved because it is become a lack of respect of the value of the human soul. That does happen, you know. And that's why we can have a victim for robbery, for a rape, for a beating -- scream out for help in the midst of a crowdand no one stops, but just keeps on passing by. The Commandment deals with the fact that life is sacred.

Several years ago there was a hit on Broadway that is still being repeated by summer stock theaters. It's called: "I Remember Mama" . . . and Mama is this wonderful old character who always saw the best in everybody. If she couldn't see it readily, then she looked for it. But that wasn't the case with her sister, Mrs. Solfelt -- she only saw the things that were wrong in people, and especially in her brother Christopher. Mama understood Chris, but her sister always looked upon her brother as no good, a down-and-out drunkard.

....when Uncle Chris died, all the family gathered in his little room because somehow or other they felt that Uncle Chris must have left them something in his will. Then there comes the moment in the play when Mama walks into the room with a little account book in her hand, and she looks at the little group, including her sister, and she says, "There will be no will -- and there's no money either." Mrs. Solfelt jumps to her feet, points to her sister and says, "What's that you have in your hand? -- all the bills from the liquor store" ...and Mama says, "No. Let me read it to you. You know how Uncle Chris was lame? -- and how he always walked with a limp? It was his one thought -- lame people. He would have liked to be a doctor, but instead he helped them in other ways. Look what's on the last page: Joseph

Spinelli --- 14 years old - tubercular left leg - \$337.18 (walks now) . . "

"Eocher Jensen - 9 years - club foot - \$227.50 (walks now) . . "

"Arnie Seifelt -- 9 years -- fractured knee cap -- \$442.16 . . "

...and just then Arnie comes rushing into the room. His mother didn't know what Chris had done for him.....

And Nana says, "It doesn't tell the end about Arnie -- I'd like to write:

"walks now -- yes, maybe even runs."

This Commandment was intended to make us walk as people who look at the world through God's eyes, that all life is sacred. And it's not the keeping of the law that's important -- -- it's not the keeping of the letter of the law that's important -- -- but the spirit as well.

You know, there's a saying in the Book of Proverbs
that we can justify our every deed....but God
looks at our motives.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER/SISTER"
(Sixth in the Series on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

4400000 20:14

We continue today the series of sermons based upon the general theme of The Ten Commandments. Each sermon has been introduced with a prefatory remark. Hear now what's to be said at the very beginning today. Jonathan Swift once said, "I have never been surprised to find men wicked, but I have often been surprised to find them not ashamed."

This points to what Joseph Wood Crutch has called "The New Immorality" - - there has always been wickedness among men, but never until now have so many apparently accepted it and taken it for granted -- such things as personal dignity, saying in effect: "Everyone does it - - I can't see that it really hurts anybody"so we speak today, we who are drawing the benefit of a permissive generation.

How did it happen? It didn't just happen. In "No, No Calcutta" which tells the story of how the showing of that musical was banned in South Australia, Dr. John Count, the psychologist, uses a significant illustration. He tells of what he calls a classical psychological experience....

...a frog was placed in cold water, and then the temperature was slowly and imperceptibly increased. Eventually the temperature reached the boiling point, that is, eventually, but as you know now, only gradually. Yet all this time the frog makes no effort to escape, because the change occurred so slowly. There was no recognition of danger. But eventually the frog died, making no attempt whatsoever at self-preservation.....

So, someone has observed, it is with smoking. If the effects of smoking were immediately visible, then the smoker would stop smoking. But we are told the effect is going to take twenty years to arrive, as it did in the case of my brother it worked so gradually, but then the damage was done. So it is suggested by analogy, that there could be what might be called a "moral desensitization, which happens so gradually that one day, all unexpectedly, we wake up and find the standards destroyed and irreparable damage is done.

That's why, do I have to tell you again, I come back with all the strength that I can command to ask you to give heed to the Ten Commandments. For it does seem to some of us in recent years that we've become insensitive to them, and permit ourselves to believe that we can ignore them. And then every now and then we painfully recognise the fact that there's damage done. It was a wise man who said: You don't break the Commandments - - but failure to observe them and respect them can break you!

Now today in the series it's the Commandment: Thou shalt not commit adultery.....

I can only tell it to you as it was:

- - There is the paradox of human nature that there was no sin regarded in Judaism that was regarded with greater horror than adultery. And there was no sin which, to judge by the sages and prophets, which was more common. It's written in the Book of Proverbs, the 6th chapter, the 32nd verse:

"He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself."

I can only tell it to you as it was:

- - I can only tell it to you as it's been written - - I can only tell it to you as it's been echoed as the voice of God. The fact remains that the writings of the rebukes of the prophets make it clear that the horror that was attached to the sin of

adultery did not stop its being committed. I can only tell it to you as it's written -- in Jeremiah, the 5th chapter, verses 7,8 one reads:

"How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of harlots. They were well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife."

I can only tell it to you as it was -- in the eyes of the old Jew, adultery was especially the crime committed against the marriage bed.

I can only tell it to you as it was:

-- in primitive times it was general for the husband to have the right to kill any man who seduced his wife -- partly because adultery was a crime against property, and partly because the whole structure of society was built upon the family. This explains why in the ancient codes the penalty for adultery was death. It is written in Leviticus, the 20th chapter, the 10th verse:

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death"

It is written in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, a man who lies with the woman, and the woman likewise. So you shall purge the evil from Israel"

I can only tell it to you as it was:

-- In days gone by if a woman was accused of adultery, she was taken in what we would call the village square, and in sight of all the people who had quickly come, her clothes were stripped from her breasts and her breasts were exposed -- for, said they, you have exposed yourself to a man who is not your husband, and

now in shame you are exposed to all of us . . .

...but that was not enough. According to their ritual, they had prepared for her to eat the coarsest of all grain that was fed to animals, and she was forced to eat it, the conclusion being, you have been as an animal, with an uncontrolled appetite.....and then if they had reason to believe that she had actually committed adultery, they would reach for the stones and they would stone her to death, along with the man who was involved - - I can only tell it to you as it was.....

Now why, you want to ask, do you? -- we who are arrogant enough as to put questions to God -- why do you come down so heavy against this sin, God? Why do you make it punishable by death as once it was?

But there's an answer, of course. What is most precious in the sight of God? Honestly now, ask yourself that question: what is most precious to God? And you know the answer. The thing most precious to God is a human being...and a human being isn't a thing, and a human being isn't an animal. A human being isn't meant to have undisciplined appetite....a human being isn't meant to be exploited as a thing that's picked up at will and put aside when the pleasure has run its course.

In God's plan for us He placed a high value upon the family. And to preserve the sanctity of the family He rules against anything that allows the violation of the marriage bed - - because He places a high value upon a human being.

And how we have a generation on our hands that parades this business of sex - - talks openly about it and displays it freely -- this thing called sex which was meant to be a perfectly beautiful thing - - - between the man and the woman who belong to each other, nothing is more beautiful than this complete identifi-

cation, when soul and body cry out to each other. That's why we have a word for it -- when it reaches the ultimate we call it consummation -- a perfectly beautiful thing. But we have a generation on our hands that parades it, talks openly about it and displays it freely. They've done quite a job of talking about what comes naturally. But they haven't gone far enough. Honestly, they haven't. They can tell us how it all starts: strong desires and powerful urges. When will they tell us how it all ends? God knew. And that's the point that the Hebraic-Christian tradition has been dealing with for centuries.

Now for a moment -- what's so wrong about adultery, if two people could be drawn to each other? Indulge me for a little while, I'm nostalgic yet. As some of you may know, I went back home to the 'hills-of-home' last Sunday and had the good fortune to preach where I had been cradled in my mother's arms and brought for baptism, where I was named for Jesus Christ....I stood within the very shade of the altar where the holy hands of a godly man confirmed me in the Christian faith fifty-one years ago. It was more than a sentimental journey....

....I thought of the street on which I lived, where I played and where people helped to bring me up -- the people who have known me as no other people have ever known me.....

And I remembered two things in particular -- I remembered the house where Carlton Bennett's grandfather lived, and had a back porch. And those were the days when milk was delivered daily in bottles, and where you washed the bottle after you emptied the contents and got it ready for the milk-man to pick up the next day -- you put 10¢ in the bottle or you put in a ticket, and for that value he gave you another quart of milk.....

....I saw a nickel and five pennies in that milk bottle one day. It was too much for me -- I took three or five pennies, I've forgotten which. Eventually my mother discovered it in my possession. She knew nothing about

childhood and adolescent psychology - - - she only knew one thing: I had done something that I shouldn't have done. She didn't ask herself, what will happen to Raymond's personality if I press the point?...embarrass him? - - - she didn't ask any of those questions. She only knew that I had something that didn't belong to me. And to the day I die, and as God gives me memory, I'll hear to my soul's well-being her words: "Take it back, Raymond - - it doesn't belong to you."

Now that's what's wrong with adultery -- we take something that doesn't belong to us. And the hardest lesson for two people who may thoroughly enjoy their relationship is the recognition of the sad and sober thought that there are some things that are not ours to give, and there are some things that are not ours to take. That's what's wrong with adultery -- some things you can't give, and some things you can't take, no matter how well you may rationalize - -

"Take it back -- it's not yours!"

I reflect upon it on more than one occasion when I stand with a couple making promises to each other and rings are slipped on each other's fingers. What does that ring represent? -- the fact that there are two people who belong to each other as they do not belong to anybody else, that's what that ring represents - - "I belong to him, and he belongs to me" - - - in the old Prayer Book of the Anglican Church, when the rings were exchanged they had such words as these: " . . . and with my body I thee honor . . . " That's what's wrong with adultery -- the giving of what's not yours to give....the taking of what isn't yours to take.

Now indulge me again. My first main job and how I got to know the streets of Williamsport was to work on a milk wagon. I got 50¢ a day. In the summer-time we chopped the ice and covered the milk bottles in the crates and covered it with canvas to keep it from spoiling....in the winter-time we had the problem of the milk freezing and the caps being raised up -- you can picture it, some of

you. But what I want to tell you is that one day the man who owned the milk route was somewhat troubled because a stranger came, not a regular customer, and he made a purchase on the street -- a half-pint of cream, a pint of milk and a quart of milk....and as he walked away the man who owned the route was somewhat troubled and he said, "This may not be the last I'll see this man or hear from him." And in my curiosity I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He's an inspector."and in those days they made periodic inspections because there were some milk men who would stretch their dollars by stretching their milk -- they would add water -- and so these tests would be made periodically. And that was my first introduction to the word adultery. They were on guard lest milk would be adulterated.

And what was that? It was simply cheapening the product -- introducing an ingredient that really didn't belong there, making it something inferior, if not less than pure. And that's what's wrong with adultery -- it cheapens the relationship, makes it less than what it's meant to be.

I'm going to suggest to our Associate Pastor, who directs our Youth Ministry, that he buy a supply of what I'm going to read to you now. It's called "A Letter To Teenage Friends" - - -

" . . . I'm not surprised at your confusion over the question of sexual morality. The world around you is uncertain and speaks with many conflicting voices; although I don't pretend to have the final word, nevertheless I'm glad you have given me the opportunity to try to clarify the matter for you.

When your parents tell you that sex is the bond of marriage and must be reserved for that purpose, they are not being blatantly old-fashioned. Neither are they, in the name of some arbitrary morality, trying to deprive you of freedom and pleasure. Morality, after all, derives from the experience of mankind as to what is good for people and what is harmful. Your parents speak with love out of a greater knowledge than yours to protect you from potential misfortune which they understand, but which you as yet do not.

" . . . From what you have told me of your thinking on this matter, I believe there are two things that you need to know. The first is that sex is not always the beautiful thing you envision. It can be, of course, within the protecting walls of a life-long exclusive marital commitment. But sex, when it is abused, becomes an ugly, horrible thing that brings not pleasure but pain, and suffering, and sorrow. Don't let the mythology of the movies and novels persuade you that illicit extramarital sex is glamorous and thrilling. It is usually furtive, awkward, sordid. Its pleasures are fleeting and its painful consequences may be lifelong. It does not deepen, strengthen and beautify an affectionate relationship which marital sex may do, but leads almost invariably to contempt and hatred.

The other thing you need to know is that sex is dangerous, like dynamite. It serves an important purpose when properly handled but it destroys people when it is not. I am not referring solely to such things as venereal disease and illegitimate pregnancies -- although both of these are far greater dangers than you think, and doctors and clergymen see a constant procession of sad and frightened youngsters who thought they knew how to take care of themselves. I'm referring more to the traumatic psychological effects of promiscuous behavior, which often lie deeply buried in the subconscious mind and play havoc in the later life, making people incapable of mature adult relationships, wrecking marriages and destroying innocent children.

Sex is not to play with, my friends -- it is not a form of recreation or entertainment. It is the bond of marriage, the means of parenthood and a source of joy when used as God intended. When it is taken out of the context of marital bonds it is as dangerous as a game of catch with a live hand grenade.

Perhaps the foregoing will help you to see what we parents and counsellors mean when we say that extra-marital sex is wrong. We do not mean merely that it is destructive-dangerous, but it takes something of beauty and makes it ugly -- but it produces not happiness and well-being but makes suffering and sorrow. That's what we mean when we say it's wrong. I hope you can see, therefore, that your parents, far from trying to deprive you of any good thing, are in fact trying to keep you from prematurely seizing and ruining this wonderful but fragile thing called sex. They are trying to see that you in your youthful eagerness do not throw away your own future happiness . . . "

Now I must conclude the sermon by telling you that I'm perfectly aware of the fact that I'm a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it

well be that in this group now present, as could be true of almost any group that you might find anywhere, there are some who have committed the sin of adultery. I must tell you this: adultery is a sin. But adultery is not the only sin.

And as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ I declare to you that sin can be forgiven. That's the wonderful thing about it. And you can read for yourself how they brought to Jesus Christ a woman caught in the very act of adultery, and they wanted to stone her to death. And Jesus Christ said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

...you know how the story goes, there wasn't a single stone reached for. And Jesus said, "Where are your accusers?" And none raised his voice nor his hand. And Jesus Christ said, "Neither do I condemn you - - go, and sin no more."

...but occasionally I've discovered in my relationship with people that when the sin has been committed, and the person who committed it is truly sorry, and asks to be forgiven - - - occasionally, not very often, but occasionally - - the other refuses to forgive. And that, I say to you with all the strength that I can command, is a greater sin.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE GREATEST THIEF"
(Seventh in the Series of Sermons on the Ten
Commandments)

Exodus 20:15

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Today we come to the concluding section in the study of the Ten Commandments. Only a few more remain to be considered. Today's Commandment that warrants attention is a very simple directive: Thou shalt not steal.

If you were to exercise your mind by listing the Commandments according to their priority, where would you put this one? There is no question where you would put the first one, because the first Commandment is basic to all the Commandments. The rest have no meaning until you first reckon with the fact that God is God, and His authority is to be revered and respected . . . but this one: Thou shalt not steal -- how important do you think it to be?

If you were a business man, there's no question how important you would think it to be, and as a consumer, there is no question as to how important you should think it to be. Some of us have to pay the prices that we pay just because people pilfer -- the loss in merchandise is absolutely appalling, to say nothing of the expense involved in securing the necessary safeguards against pilfering and stealing. If you were a merchant, there's no question as to how important you would think this Commandment to be.

By the same token, if you've ever been victimized, you would know how important this Commandment is. Interestingly enough, when God gave this Commandment, it's a Commandment that deals with material possessions. The Children of Israel had very little material possessions, you know that. They were a people on the march. There wasn't a single one of them who had a key to a safe deposit box... there wasn't a single one of them who had a deed to a piece of real estate..... there wasn't a single one of them who had a house that he could call his very own

property. What they had a little bit of clothing on their backs -- that was about it. They were a people on the march. And yet God says, among the ten things that He gave them as specific rules, this one regarding property.

Well, you may say to yourself, if a man has a great deal, if somebody were to steal something, it wouldn't be very important. But stealing is stealing, Robin Hood notwithstanding. And on the other hand you may quickly say to yourself, if a man has very little, then of course what he has is exceedingly precious to him, and if it were to be taken from him it would be a great loss.

Now one also is quick to say to himself, I thought God was interested in spiritual things! When you talk about the Commandment, Thou shalt not steal, you're thinking in terms of property, material things. Are material things important to God? And the answer, of course, is Yes. . . . so much so that there are those who maintain, and I think quite properly so, that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions, because Christianity is always telling us the kind of value that we ought to place on material things....because you cannot associate a person apart from the things that he possesses. Tell me about the things you own, tell me about the material things that you value, and I'll tell you something about your character. A person is as he thinks....a person is as he does.....a person is according to the things that he grasps and calls his very own.

Do I have to tell you what you already know, that there are only three ways by which you come into possession of things? You're right -- the first way is by the sweat of your brow, by the exercise of your talent, by your day's work. You get a hold of certain things that you're able to possess because you've worked for them.

The second way you happen to have possession of certain things is because somebody's been kind enough and generous enough to give them to you. During their lifetime they've said: we want you to have this. And what joy we know

when we're thought of so kindly and so generously.....and who hasn't been thrilled to high heaven to discover that he's been remembered in somebody's will, as in the last will and testament that somebody prepared they wanted you to have something.

But there's a third way by which a person may come into possession of certain things. It's a very ugly way -- by stealth or by force. He steals. He robs from another person.

God looks with favor upon the first two -- God wants us to work hard and to be able to earn our way.....and God encourages us to be generous and to think in terms of other people with what we have. God frowns and curses on a man who would take by stealth or force what would belong to somebody else.

Now you may ask me, tell me now in plain, unvarnished language -- what's wrong about stealing?

The thing that's wrong about it is that nobody would want to live in a society where people steal. Let me put it for you this way as sometimes I put it to boys and girls in Confirmation Class -- God gave the Ten Commandments from a human perspective for two reasons: first, He wanted to protect them against a society in which they would find themselves living once they had arrived at their destination. They would be surrounded by a people of different mores, they'd be exposed to an entirely different ethical and moral scheme. They were meant to be different. God had high hopes for them, they were to be a kind of Exhibit A as to how people could live together, and live together exceedingly well. And so that's why He gives them the rules and the regulations according to a manufacturer's manual: "This is how you can best get along with one another."

The second reason: God wants us to be content with one another. God wants us to live together in peace and harmony, with trust and respect for one another. When you start stealing, you disrupt that.

Let me take you a little further back in time to my college days, the days of the Great Depression as we knew it. We sent our laundry back home in those laundry packets or cases some of you may readily recall. I lived on the third floor of a very simple dormitory.

....I was exceedingly thrilled, honestly I was, when I went to my new situation to discover that I was surrounded by people who seemed to trust one another. There wasn't a single room that was locked in that dormitory, and we went back and forth into one another's rooms, freely, very easily.....

This element of trust and respect created a very happy atmosphere and made life on campus a very pleasant thing.

But then one day, after the mid-term, the fellow who roomed next to me discovered that a five-dollar bill had been taken out of his laundry case, where he had put it, probably his mother had sent it to him.

....the atmosphere changed completely. Every single one of us who lived in that dormitory was suspect. It couldn't be otherwise -- we hadn't any reason to believe that somebody from outside came in, we were that removed from the town. And then, eventually, I found that people were reaching for keys, and doors were being locked, and one became a bit troubled when he went through the door where ordinarily he could very easily have walked in, to find it now locked. It created an entirely different atmosphere -- no longer was there this feeling of trust.....

That's what's wrong with stealing. We begin to lose faith in one another. We no longer have that harmony and good will and respect.

I told you last Sunday that the thing that's most precious to God is a human soul, a person. And when we steal, we do something to that person. His whole personality is affected by it -- it isn't simply that something's taken away -- it's the fact that that person has been offended. You know very well

what I mean.

I could go on in the sermon, if time would permit, to tell you how in ways that we seldom think a person can steal. It's not simply reaching into somebody else's pocket, it's not simply defrauding somebody else, or taking from a shelf or a display booth. A person can steal from God by keeping from God the better part of his nature. God knows our potential, God knows how much we can love, God knows how good we could be. But we can steal from God when we keep from Him so great a blessing.

Do I have to tell you how we can steal and keep from those who are nearest to us by virtue of our relationship with them are the only ones who could care? There are certain things that I as a son could give my father that nobody else could give him, and every time I gave him less than what a son should give his father, I robbed my father....

....there were certain things that I as a son could give my mother that only a son could give my mother, and every time I was less than a son should have been to a mother, I robbed her, I kept from her -- I stole for myself what was rightfully hers.

In the final analysis, this is what's wrong with stealing: it's a sin against God, because from the Christian perspective everything that we have belongs to God. I may put my name on the deed, I may put my name on the stocks and bonds, but in essence everything that I have and everything that you have is on deposit by God, to be used by Him.

Today in the calendar of the Church is Pentecost, when many of us will remember how we made vows and promises to be the kind of person that God wants us to be (Reaffirmation of Confirmation vows by congregation)

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Dec. 21, 1978

"A LIE IS A LIE"

(Sermon based on the Ten Commandment)

Exodus 20:16

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon is the next-to-the-last in the series dealing with the Ten Commandments, and we're about to consider the Commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

Presumably with tongue in cheek Mark Twain on one occasion observed, there are 869 different ways to tell a lie. Anyone who has had any experience at all in the telling of lies knows full well that there are big lies and little lies -- white lies, half-truths, dark and ugly lies. What now is to be said regarding this? Well let's consider the Commandment as it's fully stated -- not simply "Thou shalt not bear false witness" . . . but the Commandment puts it specifically: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

There is not one word in the English language for 'false witness' -- are you aware of that? There is not one word in the English language for 'false witness.' To the contrary, there are many, many words. There is no word, it's been said, in English which has so many equivalents -- such as:

calumny . . . slander . . . misrepresentation . . . vituperation
. . . insult . . . scurrility . . . railing . . . detraction . .
. . . whispering . . . back-biting . . . depreciation . . . vilification
. . . innuendo . . . abuse . . . tattle . . . insolence . . .
. . . sneering . . . taunting . . . jibes . . . jeers . . .
. . . defamation . . . libel . . . satire . . . sarcasm . . .
lampoon . . . sensoriousness . . . tale-bearing . . . malice
. . . spite . . . envy . . . evil-surmising . . . gossip . . .

...it's been said there is no word that has so many equivalents in the English language. So great importance we take in our consideration this bearing of false witness.

It's an exceedingly interesting thing to note that so far as the society of Israel was concerned, it was not simply the giving of the Ten Commandments that they took seriously. It was the application of the Ten Commandments to society.

Are you aware of the fact that as far as the law of Moses is concerned, there are three general enactments which formed part of the social law of Israel regarding this specific Commandment? -- vatoes, which were introduced in order to undo so far as was possible the effects of evil speaking and to make people shrink from the habit of evil-speaking. As an example regarding this Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

-- the first enactment was that a man should never be condemned upon the evidence of one witness. According to good Jewish tradition, at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. Moses decreed that no one man's word should ever be sufficient to condemn another. . . .

Let me pause at that point quite parenthetically and ask you how well you apply that test when someone comes and tells you something about someone else? How quick are you to believe the first person who reports to you what may in the end be false testimony concerning somebody else? So stained are we by original sin that it seems a lot easier for us to believe ill regarding somebody else than to believe good.....

.....in the application of this basic Commandment Moses so decreed a series of three enactments, and the first one was this: that you have to get the testimony from more than one person.

-- the second decree which Moses ordained with a view to stamping

out the pernicious habit of slander had the effect of putting upon the tale-bearer himself the whole responsibility for the condemnation and the punishment of the person he had accused. According to the law of Moses, the slanderer who brought the accusation had by his own hand to cast the first stones at the man being accused. The slanderer, that is to say, had to see the full effect of his own words.....as much as to suggest, if I bring this charge, if I speak this slander -- if I bear this tale, what will be the final result if this man is found guilty?

....he had to see in his fellow man, standing alone and naked before him...he had to stoop himself and lift the first stone....he had to fling that stone at the shrinking figure who stood some paces from him . . . he had to hear the thud of that stone, and listen to the other stones from the hands of others which his act had set loose . . . he had to meet the eyes of the dying man. And if the story was a lie, then the torments of hell would begin to be stirred up in the slanderer's breast.

-- that was the second enactment by Moses: "You bring the charge -- then you cast the first stone in view of other people as the man stands naked before you -- you look him straight into the eye!"

It can be freely translated that Moses perhaps was the kind of a man that if somebody came bearing a tale about another man, he would say, "Now that you've told me I cannot help but know it. But we can't stop at this point. And since I have some measure of responsibility in this regard, you come with me now and you tell that man what you just told me -- you tell him, face-to-face." That's the way Moses would have handled it.

There was a third decree, and that simply was this: that if one brought testimony and it was proven false -- then the person who brought the false testi-

mony would receive the punishment that the other person would have received had he been found guilty.

...so the people of Israel took seriously this Commandment and endeavored to stamp out pernicious false-bearing witness.

Now as I stand at this sacred desk I must tell you what I honestly believe, that man is by nature a social being. He cannot go it by himself, and he is made strong by the bonds that hold him. Had that ever occurred to you, that you and I are made strong by the bonds by which we are held!

Take the spiritual bond, or the religious bond -- haven't I told you before that that word religion comes from the Latin that means "to be held by, to be bound to" -- and you and I are made strong because we're bound by God. So there's that spiritual or religious bond with which we must deal as God gave us the Commandment: "I am the Lord thy God" -- remember whose you are and whom you are meant to serve -- I am bound to you, you are meant to be bound to me -- don't let anything sever that bond." And so God gave the Commandment, "Give me due and proper respect . . ."

There is the family bond -- the bond by which we are held by those to whom we are nearest and dearest . . . and so God gave the Commandment regarding how important this family bond is : Respect for parents and elders . . .

There is a blood bond.....we are knit together in this fabric of humanity, and all life is to be seen as sacred, and so God gives the Commandment: "You don't kill -- you keep this bond sacrosanct with your fellow men -- you don't murder."

There is a sex bond . . . we are held together by those with whom we are associated sexually. And because that's a very precious and a fragile thing, God writes into the Commandments a measure of protection for the sex bond -- You don't commit adultery . . .

There's the property bond -- some of us are held by the things that we possess, and as I told you the other Sunday, you can't separate a man from the

things that are important or ~~the~~, and because they are ~~able~~ to have value, because they belong to somebody, God gives us the Commandment: You don't steal, you don't take what belongs to somebody else.

And interestingly enough, perhaps you haven't thought about it, there is the language bond -- we are held together with one another by the words that we speak. There are certain words that you have spoken to me that have endeared you to my soul. When I look back across the years and think of those who encouraged me in my Christian commitment, when I think of those who spoke the right word at the right time in the right way to keep me from falling -- the very encouragement that I've needed most -- I've been bonded and I have been held and I have been sustained by words that have been spoken. There is this language bond -- -- and because that bond can be abused -- words can heal, and words can kill.....

-- with my lips I can speak the truth

...and with my lips I can lie.

--- with my lips I can speak words that can set a song

in your soul.....with my lips I can cut you to the quick.

Words are precious.

Words are important. They hold us to one another, or they can separate us.

I have a high regard for a physician friend of mine who once told me, when I had an appointment with him, how the word had just come to the man that he was going to see next about a unfortunate thing in the life of his daughter. And he said, "I dread seeing this man because of the hate that's going to swell up within his soul. And you know what I'm going to say to him? I'm going to say to him, when I see him, 'Now take pause for a moment, and realize that when you see your daughter for the first time, that whatever words you speak to her are going to determine your relationship from that time onward' . . ." Words are that important.

We can speak the truth in love . . . we can lie. God says, you don't lie -- you speak the truth.

But good people have been known to lie. And you're not forgetting, are you, that these Commandments were given to God's people! -- not to strangers and aliens. These Commandments were given to people whom God loved, and in whom He was making so great an investment.

Good people have been known to lie. Good people lie because they're not perfect. Every single one of us is stained by original sin.

I can understand why people lie because I've never forgotten the first lie I told my mother, and how she could probe the depth of my soul. I understood why I lied. I also understood why I should never have lied.

If a mother can be forgiving to her child, how much more forgiving can God be to us, His children? And if anyone should ever lie to you -- begin at this point, my friend, and say to yourself -- there but for the grace of God could be I!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BE CONTENT"
(Last in the series of sermons based on the
Ten Commandments - IX and X)

Exodus 20:17

This sermon concludes a series that's been preached from this pulpit over the past eight weeks. The focus of our attention has been the Ten Commandments, those rules for life that God gave to His children called Israel. And as the sermon series concludes today we consider the Ninth and the Tenth Commandments together, for both have to deal with the same issue, and specifically with that word covet.

Now the two Commandments read like this:

"Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's house,
you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor
his servants, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor
anything that is your neighbor's."

It is simply to say, boiled down into one sentence, that we're talking about a desire, a desire to have that which does not belong to us.

Living in the kind of world in which we do, it seems that just about anything that we would ever wish or want is easily within our grasp. So what's the big fuss? We live in an abundant age. More often than not our thinking is such that if we want something, we really need something, we can buy it. Does the fact that the Commandments that we're considering today are numbered Nine and Ten on the list make them any less important than Commandment number Five, or Six, or Seven? Whether you're thinking it or not, these are two tough Commandments to deal with.

Up to now, as this sermon series has unfolded, we have been talking about Commandments that have to do with our relationship to other people, or the way we live in society. But these two Commandments -- they are tougher in a way because they deal with a person's inner thoughts. It's one thing to talk about controlling your actions -- it's an entirely different matter when we

talk about controlling your feelings, and what you think, and your emotions. For these two Commandments are the kind that can be broken without the knowledge of any other person.

I don't know what your understanding of the word covet is. But you're right if you define it this way: that to covet something is to desire to possess, to wish, to lust, to seek after. But literally speaking, the word means to pant after - - that is, to go after something to the point of exhaustion. To covet something is to desire that which you don't possess. And that in itself is not bad, for who among us doesn't have a hero that we can call to mind who has certain traits in character that we'd like to emulate, or has a certain aspect about his life after which we'd like to pattern ours? The careful reading of the Commandment of course reveals that there is a place for desire within the heart. But what is not allowed in God's scheme of things is the desire to have that which we have no right to possess.

Now, no matter how a person reads history, you'll have to allow for the fact that down through the centuries the great struggle has always been between the "haves" and the "have-nots." This Commandment says that there are some things that you have no right to possess.

But there's a bit more to this business of coveting. The way the Greeks used the word, in its original meaning, they understood it as a desire to have more, the desire to go after something as if to crave it and not be satisfied until it was in your hands, and it was a word that was used to describe a detested quality in a man's personality, and no where in the Greek world was it ever used in a positive way.

There is, in a certain sense, a coming face-to-face with the basic part of human nature in this Commandment - - we're so built and constructed that desire is instinctive. It's one of the strongest parts of our being. But the value of any powerful force depends on what use we make of it. The urge to

want -- the desire to have -- the drive to be -- all of these can get to the point where they can so control us that they can be destructive. You think of the simplest desire that you have as it's related to the drive to gain material possessions, especially the things that money can buy, and then you band that over against the fact that it's by acquiring things that we do support ourselves and we do provide for the people who depend on us. But it's when trying to acquire things gets out of proportion, life turns sour. The drive and the desire to have can lead to dishonesty -- the sense of fairness in our relationship disappears and all we can think about is getting what we want, no matter what the price, no matter what we have to do to get it.

And so the consequences for ourselves and for others is never thought of and the drive is so strong and desire to have becomes so great it can lead to exploitation. The power of greed takes over and the use of others is a method we use for selfish means. You know, that's one of the reasons we have the Child Labor Laws we do in this country, that at one time in our history employers took advantage of young children in order to turn a profit in their business. The working conditions were unsafe and the hours were long, and there was no concern expressed for the health and the welfare of the workers.....or prostitutes -- it's in the same ball park -- it's the making of a profit off the exploitation of another person. We live in a materialistic world, and what we do has to do with our drive and desire to get. And we think we can buy our way into happiness.

If you look at the ads that appear in television or on the radio or in magazines, every one of them is designed to awakening desire so that someone can turn a profit by satisfying a stimulated need.

But coveting can appear in a more subtle way. How about that desire for status and place, the kind of drive that can lead one to be jealous, envious, gaining the things that were in, are signs that a person has arrived. What are the status symbols of our day? What are the things that you really crave? -- so

that you can show folks that you've climbed to the top of the ladder of success?

Or how about the form of coveting that's the coveting of people? The Commandment very specifically forbids the coveting of your neighbor's mate, but what about friendship, and the way people play one person off against the other? You know there are some people who can't stand to see their best friend spend time with somebody else.

So deep down inside all of us is that idea that if we can get, that if we possess, and if we have, then we'll be happy. The feeling in the heart and the mind is that 'if I had this, and if I had that, I'd be satisfied.' But it's true, isn't it, that once we get what we want, and the brief thrill is over, that we lose interest. Like the young child with a new toy -- for an hour or two or a day or two he's fascinated with it, and it's tossed aside and he's standing at the store window, wanting something else. There's the desire, like the rhythm of hunger and thirst, the satisfying of a desire, and then the rise of the desire again. And it's for that reason that the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus laid down this prescription -- he said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his possessions. If you want to make a man happy, take away his desires." In other words, a person can't be satisfied by acquiring things, but the cure for coveting is learning to be content.

They tell a story about an old king who was dying of melancholy. And after he had tried all the doctors and the wise men in vain, he was told that if he could get the shirt of a perfectly happy man and wear it, then he, too, would be happy. And so there was the search for the perfectly happy man...and they found him -- a traveler, walking along the road, a man of little means, without a shirt on his back. If the possession of things brought contentment, then this ought to be the happiest age in the history of the world, for never has our civilization had so much of the things which were once the possession of the privileged few and are within the reach of so many.

And yet it's also true, isn't it, this age in history is the most neurotic and dissatisfied, and that it seems that the mark of an affluent society is unrest, and unease.....that sooner or later we discover that contentment is not to be found in the possession of things.

So then where is contentment to be found and how might we go about dealing with this business of coveting? In Shakespeare's Henry VI, the King is asked the question: "But if thou be King, where is thy crown?" The King answers, "My crown is in my heart, not on my head, not decked with diamonds and Indian stones nor to be seen. My crown is called content!" A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.

In the first case, any situation that causes someone to lose their self-respect cannot produce happiness. In the second case, any forbidden relationship which is the cause of tragedy for others cannot produce happiness. In the third case, any situation that causes a person to be separated from God cannot produce happiness. One sure way of being unhappy is always to desire what other people have. The Christian is meant to be content and recognize the place for things in this world, that there are some things he will never have, there are some things that once he does have them, will never bring happiness if he keeps them to himself. It's what a person does with what he has that determines his character, and happy indeed is the person who recognizes that he can't take it with him, and so lives life with the intent of being content and to share what he has.

Dane Gordon is the author of a play called "Too Little For Milo"....and there's a point in the play where the dialogue unfolds, when the teenager daughter who becomes upset with some of the actions of her parents confronts her father and puts to him a question in a very pointed way, as only a teenager can. She asks her father, "What is it that you really want in life?"

...and the father tells his daughter, "I want to be the

best of my kind in my business."

...and the daughter asks him, "Then what?" . . . and he said, "We want to make a fortune!"

...and the daughter replies, "Then what?" . . . "Well, we want to travel a little."

..."And then what?" . . . "We want to be sure to be able to put you through school."

..."And then what?" . . . "Well, we want to build a summer place."

..."Then what?" . . . "We want to retire and be able to do some of the things we've never been able to do."

..."Then what?" . . . and with an exasperated sigh, the father replies, "Well then, I guess we'll die."

...and the daughter asks, "Then what?"

And wasn't it Jesus who told the story about the man who had such a craving and desire for things that he amassed all the possessions and put them in his barn, only to lose his own soul?

I don't know how it is with you when you've kind of tried to take stock of yourself in light of the Commandments, but when it comes to these that have to do with coveting, I wonder how I would react if I'd find myself in a situation like the story that was told to my father by Mae Troxler -- about the man who went to his neighbor and he said, "You see that new car out there in front of my house -- my brother gave me that!" And you know what the neighbor said? -- "I wish I could be a brother like that."

...now you think about that.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)